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## \* \* Historical Sketch \* \*

### Of the Methodist Church in Rockingham and Surrounding Country.

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Long before the establishment of Rockingham, as a town, "the people called Methodists" were cast and moulded into a living, active organization throughout this country. How long before that event, it would be difficult to determine with exactness. We infer from the testimony of Bishop Francis Asbury, as set forth in his own quaint but striking style of journalizing, that they had a reasonably firm foothold several years anterior to the summer of 1788, when the town of Rockingham was "laid off" by Commissioners John Cole and Henry William Harrington, who were appointed for that purpose by the County Court of Richmond County. The old Bishop, by the way, stands in history as the premier type and representative of the itinerant principle of Methodism; and he was fittingly characterized by a primitive Georgian as "the man that rambles throughout the United States," for his life was literally spent and consumed in itinerating back and forth between the hills of New England and the capes of the Carolinas.

As early as 1787 we find him, as recorded in the second volume of his Journal, "surrounded with waters and hideous swamps, near the head of Pasquotank River," in Eastern North Carolina; thence on to Newbern, and into South Carolina, and on up through Anson and Rowan counties to Virginia, and on upon his ceaseless round until, in due course of time, his steps are retraced over the same ground and through new and constantly changing fields. Glorious man and servant of God! We can but pause to give an expression of wholly impartial reverence to his name and memory! It was his portion in life, and loved by him for the very work's sake, to toil and travel and suffer; broken in health, he was often the victim of excruciating pain, and yet the Roman virtue of perseverance was ever in and with him. He scorned to shrink from hardship, from sacrifice, from suffering, if but to serve the cause of his Lord and Master. And thus consecrated to God, after more than twenty-eight years of itinerant life in America, he died in Spottsylvania county, Va., on the 31st of March, 1816.

Here is his likeness, as drawn by Bishop Fitzgerald, with accompanying comment in his little book of "Centenary Cameos": "A medium-sized man, erect, compact and sinewy, with a ruddy complexion, lips full and firm; a massive under-jaw and square, military chin; a nose short and flattish, with the swelling nostril that indicates spirit and power; deep blue eyes that now flash keen, quick glances.

and anon seem to be fixed in high abstraction, a forehead broad but not high, the silver hair falling negligently about the kindly yet rugged face—that is Francis Asbury, the typical itinerant, the Bishop on horseback, who will ride at the head of the advancing columns of American Methodists until they shall be disbanded, when the final victory of the militant church shall bring the kingdom of this world under the dominion of the risen, reigning Son of God."

Just as loved hands might hold up to the parting gaze of a newly-enlisted soldier-boy the portrait of his hero-father whose image, borne in his heart of hearts, may prompt to deeds of knightliest valor in defence of his country, so we have attempted to present to the young Christian, especially the young Methodist starting out in the service of his King, the picture of a spiritual father the memory of whose self-sacrificing life constitutes a perennial legacy to the church, and the study of whose faithful career may stimulate to loftiest purposes of achievement in the Christian warfare. The desire to emphasize so important a fact, with the hope of impressing it upon the young minds before us, is our only apology for diverging from the strict line of our theme.

How many times Bishop Asbury may have visited North Carolina previous to 1790 we do not know; but his first trip through Richmond county seems to have been in January of that year, nearly two years after the town of Rockingham was "laid off" and a survey made in half acre lots. Ten years afterwards, that is to say in February, 1800, we find him at Henry Ledbetter's house, then located in Montgomery, but now in Stanly county. Note the following entry in his Journal: "Monday, 14th, we came to Ledbetter's." To give an idea of the physical and natural obstacles that beset his journeyings from place to place, we quote literally from him on the second day (Wednesday) after leaving Mr. Ledbetter's: "I had to pass over heavy hills, rocks and small runs, and through thick clay; we were concluding when in Charleston, and after we set out, by the excessive cold, that there was snow not far distant; when we came into North Carolina we found that upon Pee Dee and Yadkin and Deep Rivers the snow had fallen fifteen and eighteen inches deep, continuing nearly a month on the ground, and had swelled the rivers and spoiled the public roads. We lodged at Mr. Bell's, having rode only fifty miles in two days." The Mr. Bell referred to was the uncle, by marriage, of our townsman, Rev. Robert S. Ledbetter, who is so well known among us as "an Israelite indeed in whom there is no guile."

"The old Bell place," now in Stanly, is where lives Jonathan Bell, a cousin of Mr. R. S. Ledbetter, at the advanced age of ninety years, who loves to point the visitor of these days to the window in the old house near which Bishop Asbury stood when he preached. The Bishop's friend, Henry Ledbetter, was the father of Mr. R. S. Ledbetter, and he was frequently the Bishop's companion in travel. Many times they itinerated together through South Carolina, Georgia and the wild moun-

tains of Western North Carolina. Among the faithful preachers of that period no one is more fondly remembered, through accounts that come down to us by the lips of his worthy son, than Henry Ledbetter. He moved his family from what was then Montgomery, now Stanly, down into this county and settled on Little River, at the place where now lives Mr. John Ledbetter, another son of his. At this home the Bishop was a guest from time to time, and always welcomed, loved and honored.

We find that in 1806 the Bishop passed through this immediate section, and but for the interposition of a peculiar event he would at that time have preached in the town of Rockingham. The preventing circumstance, as stated by him, was nothing less than a "wedding," the contracting parties to which were not named, if known. At any rate the wedding proved to be the stronger card for the evening, and the Bishop failed to get a congregation in consequence: hence he did not preach. Resuming his journey, he went eastward toward Fayetteville, but turned his course for Wilmington and other points in Eastern North Carolina.

Now to return to the occasion of his first visit to this section, that is, January, 1799: In the second volume of his Journal occurs this passage: "After passing Helgcock Creek I preached at Night's Chapel, the name being spelled N-i-g h-t." Having traveled hitherwards direct from Randolph county, it is easy to conjecture that he crossed the creek at or near one or the other of two points that are familiar to us all, that is, Great Falls or Pee Dee mills. And by a little further stretch of license we may raise the supposition that "Night's Chapel" was the name originally applied to the first "meeting house" that was built here or hereabouts, and thus connect it with the first Methodist church ever built within the limits now embraced in the town of Rockingham. That church—an old building as far back as sixty-five years, which is remembered by our oldest inhabitant—stood on the lot immediately east of the orange-begirt avenue that leads from the Fayetteville road—now Washington street—to the residence of Mrs. J. M. Scales. It is not a pleasing reflection, but facts are but another name for grim realities: the festive bicyclist who howls along that avenue passes all unconsciously over, perhaps, "some mute, inglorious Milton," or "Cromwell, guiltless of his Country's blood:" for here was once a large grave-yard, and beneath that surface many of "the rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep."

The names of Lunce and John Bounds as preachers, are familiar in connection with memories of that old church, for they, in turn, were accustomed to "divide the word" to expectant hearers. In course of time the old church was torn down—no record of any title to it as church property being then or now in existence—and the Methodists used for their place of worship an old Academy that stood on the corner of the Laurel Hill road, on the lot where Mr. T. C. Leak lives. For details and

data connected with that epoch of our local history, we would necessarily have to rely upon tradition and the scattered and indistinct narratives that survive the years long gone; but history, accurate and based upon record, is what is desired, and most of all desirable. Hence, imitating the famous Macaulay, who commenced his equally famous history by saying: "I purpose to write the history of England from the time of the accession of James the First," thus fixing at once his point of departure and discarding the more or less conflicting accounts that antedate that period; so we, engaged in a comparatively small yet greater than Macaulay's, inasmuch as it is a work that pertains to "a kingdom not of this world," must for the true purposes of this sketch forego the pleasure of an excursion among the archives unwritten and unattested by record, and confine ourself to circumstances and facts that belong—using Macaulay's language again—"to a period within the memory of men still living."

By a deed dated Nov. 12th, 1832, Charles Robinson conveyed "two tracts or parcels of land lying and being in the town of Rockingham, designated in plan of the town by numbers 34 and 35, together with all and singular the houses, woods, waters, ways and privileges thereto belonging, or in anywise appertaining, &c.," to a Board of Trustees, acting as such under authority of the Methodist Church. That Board consisted of Masten D. Crawford, Elias Sinclair, Wiley Covington, George Thomas, Samuel Ely, William Strickland, John McAllister and William H. Covington—the last mentioned being the only survivor, at a ripe old age, and now living within one and a half miles of the town. By a deed of March 6th, 1833, Walter F. Leak conveyed to the same Trustees (with the addition of Charles Robinson to the number) "a certain lot in Rockingham, known in plan of said town as lot number 13;" and by a deed dated Oct. 17th, 1833, Martin Pickett, of Anson county, conveyed to the same Board "one tract or parcel of land in Rockingham, known in plan as number 14." By reference to the plan of survey, as made according to the original limits of the town, these various lots—running through from Washington to Franklin street—are embraced in what is now known and held as the church, Sunday school and Parsonage property of the Methodist Church. For a dozen years, or more, from the date of these conveyances, there is no evidence that a home for the Preacher's family—known in Methodist parlance as the Parsonage—had been provided, nor was any step taken to secure the same. At a period somewhere between 1843 and 1846 a quasi purchase of what was known as the Vaughan property was made for the church, to be used as a circuit parsonage. The price named in the trade was six hundred dollars, but, as will be seen in the progress of this sketch, the amount of purchase money was never raised by a general contribution of the church membership, and the soliciting committee, after persevering effort, asked relief, finally, of the Quarterly Conference from the arduous and futile undertaking of raising that six hundred dollars, and that they be allowed to turn back

into the pockets of the givers the meagre collection which they had in hand.

How the preachers in that long interm—without "local habitation and a name"—lived and dwelt and domiciled their families is a matter largely of conjecture; but, having headquarters literally in the saddle, it was only a secondary study with them as to how to hedge on the comforts and amenities of life, so their great mission be accomplished; and doubtless many a Shunamite was found within the bounds of old Rockingham circuit to offer protection and furnish a hospitable board to the wayfaring Elishas of that day.

But the parsonage: how and when was it secured to the church? It was probably in 1848 that Walter F. and James P. Leak and Robt. J. Steele bought the Vaughan property at the price before named, viz., six hundred dollars, and, in consideration of five hundred dollars to be paid them by the circuit, counting their own contribution as one hundred dollars, they executed a deed to "certain persons, trustees of the M. E. Church, South, at Rockingham," thus conveying the same for the use and benefit of the church. That deed was never registered, and was either lost or destroyed, to use the language of the record. However, the property was held continuously and used as the Methodist parsonage, but only a small part of the five hundred dollars was paid by the circuit, no itemized record of which is in existence. A new deed was executed on March 31st, 1875, by Walter F. and James P. Leak, the third party in interest, Robert J. Steele, having departed this life. The trustees to whom the second deed was made were John W. Leak, Robert S. Ledbetter, Peter W. Stansill, Robert L. Steele, James A. Covington, Henry H. Crowson and Henry C. Wall. This deed was made without consideration and simply to remedy the defect in title caused by loss of the former deed and to make practicable a conveyance of the property to a purchaser. The old parsonage, according to original plan of the town, embraces lots numbers 19 and 29, and it was about the time of this last conveyance that the property passed to private hands, the purchase money being represented by material in the present parsonage and improvements. Numbers 19 and 29, or in other words, the old parsonage property, adjoins the Presbyterian church lot, and is now owned by Mr. John W. Covington. It is well to observe here that, according to the original plan of the town its eastern boundry was what is now the eastern line of the present Methodist church lot. To this point only the town extended, and <sup>east</sup> ~~west~~ward of this, even down to 1832 and later, was the rural district, marked by swamp and woods, and the old hunter of that day needed not to go far out on the Fayetteville road to secure an eligible and sure "stand" from which to shoot a deer.

Formerly the Methodists of this section of the State were all embraced within what was known as the Pee Dee Circuit, which covered a large territory, extending from as high up the country as Salisbury, N. C., to Briton's Neck, in South Carolina. Rockingham Circuit was carved out of this big stretch of country, and continued

in the South Carolina Conference many years after the organization of the North Carolina Conference, which event took place in 1837. As at first constituted the circuit embraced seventeen charges which were located in Richmond county, N. C., and Marlborough District S. C. As to when Rockingham Circuit was formed, our information is not positive, only we know that the first "Quarterly Meeting Conference," as it was called, was held at New Hope "Meeting House"—just across the line of the Carolinas—on the 5th, of April 1833. Nicholas Tally was Presiding Elder; Joel W. Townsend and John L. Smith, Circuit preachers. Under question 4, "what number has been received on probation since last conference," the answer was, two whites and four blacks. Under question 5, "what number expelled," the answer, two whites, three colored, suggests a gain of one, and that a colored member. However, at no subsequent conference do we note so unfavorable a showing as that. The Board of stewards that had served on the Pee Dee Circuit was continued in office, with the addition of two more to the Board. The financial report showed that the 17 charges paid, for the quarterage, family and traveling expenses of the Presiding Elder and two preachers, for the whole year, \$340 28

The first conference for 1834 was not held because of the "abundance of rain that fell." The second was held on 13th of June at Rockingham. The preachers of that year were John Watts and J. W. Wellborn. At the first conference of 1835, the name of Allen Hamby appears as Presiding Elder, with preachers Allen McCorquadale and A. W. Walker. In 1836 Charles Betts was Presiding Elder, with John Robeson and Thomas S. Daniels as preachers. At the first conference of 1837 the name of John McMacken appears as the associate preacher with John Robeson. At first conference of 1838, Chas. S. Walker and Paul A. M. Williams entered as the circuit preachers. At some of these conferences resolutions were adopted condemning the common practice of treating at elections and resolving not to support any candidate who attempts to gain his election by treating with ardent spirits; also not to support any candidate who is known either by his influence or example to be favorable to the infamous practice of duelling.

The name of Bond English, P. E., appears at first conference of 1839, with Theophilus Huggins and Wm. Black as preachers. First conference of 1840, Wm. T. Harrison and Wm. McSwain, circuit preachers. First of 1841, David Derrick P. E., with Abel Hoyle preacher, without an assistant or junior preacher.

At the second conference of 1834 the name of Masten D. Crawford, local preacher, appeared for the first time in these records; likewise, at the second conference of 1841 the name of Peter W. Stansill as a steward; thence on no names in connection with the church and its history sound more familiar or call up in the memory of our oldest members so vivid a picture of the old "days of refreshing from the presence of the Lord." We note the fact that changes in the appointments to the work in the case of Presiding Elders was less frequent than in that of the local preachers,

the rule being, with exceptions now and then, to change the latter year after year. In 1842 Ira L. Potter and A. H. Richardson were the preachers; 1843, J. B. Anthony and J. W. Vandiver; 1844, M. Puckett and L. O'Neal.

At the third quarterly conference of 1844 it was resolved "That the action of the majority in the late General Conference has made a division of the Church indispensably necessary; and while we sincerely regret the necessity which has produced this state of things, all regrets are now useless and a speedy, but at the same time peaceable separation is demanded." This action refers to the then imminently threatened division, between the North and the South, of the Methodist Episcopal Church, which event did occur soon afterwards, indeed that same year since which time we have written ourselves, "Methodist Episcopal Church, South." For full information about that unfortunate occurrence, which entered largely into the causes that produced the late war, we refer to Dr. W. P. Harrison's book, entitled "Methodist Union," where may be found a complete vindication of the South and the Southern church from beginning to the close of the controversy that resulted in division. So much for that.

At the fourth conference of 1844 Robt. S. Ledbetter was licensed to preach and recommended to the traveling connection—probably the only man now living, certainly the only one within our acquaintance, of those who names have continuously appeared in these minutes from the first conference in April, 1833, up to the time mentioned above. His failure afterwards to join the Annual Conference and continue in the regular itinerant ministry was due to his broken health.

At first conference of 1845 occurs James Stacy P. E., with Michael Robbins and R. J. Limehouse as circuit preachers. In 1846 Dennis J. Simmons began his pastorate on the circuit, and for several years following there was but one preacher to do the regular work. At the fourth conference of 1846 a committee for building a parsonage for the circuit was appointed; and at a subsequent conference, viz., second conference of 1849, the Trustees reported "they were unable to raise necessary amount to pay for parsonage," &c., and said report was duly received and confirmed by the conference, the trustees stating also that they had agreed to turn back the property to its owners and resolved to refund the collections in hand.

Still another effort was made, through a committee appointed at the first conference of 1850, "for the purpose of either building or purchasing a parsonage for the circuit," to settle the long mooted parsonage question; but as to what came of it we have no record to show. Meantime the circuit was in possession of the Vaughan property as its parsonage, the conveyance having been made in the manner and by the parties already indicated and named.

To return: in 1848 J. W. Wightman was preacher on the circuit; 1849, Wm. Barringer P. E. and M. A. McKibben preacher in charge. During 1850 a resolution was adopted by quarterly conference "opposing the movement to transfer the

territory now in the S. C. Conference to the N. C. Conference, or any part of it," and requesting delegates to next general conference "to exert their influence to leave us in the relation that we now sustain to the S. C. Conference." But the transfer of territory having been made, despite the emphatic resolution in protest, a committee was appointed next "to draft and forward a petition to the presiding Bishop of the next Conference, asking him to supply Rockingham circuit with a preacher from the S. C. Conference." This petition to the Bishop seems to have been granted, for W. L. Pegues, of the S. C. Conference, served as circuit preacher in the year 1851, until Abner Erwin was substituted for him by action of 4th quarterly conference of that year. For 1852, William Barringer was continued as P. E. and E. E. Freeman preacher in charge, the first assignment to the circuit by the N. C. Conference.

In 1853 Rev. R. S. Ledbetter was assistant preacher to E. E. Freeman and was that year recommended for admission into the Annual Conference, but, for reason before stated, he never became a member of the N. C. Conference. Malcolm L. Douglas—a name familiar and sweet in memory to the older people of this community—at the same time recommended for admission, did join the Annual Conference, but died, after a brief term of service, in the town of Greensboro. The preachers for the circuit came along as follows: 1854, Ira T. Wyche, 1855-'56 Lemox Shell, with N. H. D. Wilson as P. E; 1857, N. H. D. Wilson P. E., Peter Doub and T. L. Triplett, preachers in charge; 1858, Elder the same, with Peter Doub and Geo. W. Heptinstall as preachers in charge; 1859, Peter Doub, P. E. and S. D. Adams, preachers; 1860, Doub and Adams again. The only available record closes with the 3rd Quarterly Conference of 1860, held at Hebron on September 1st., with incumbents Doub and Adams. Thus have we given a fairly well connected history of Quarterly Conferences (barring the lost minutes of the first Conference of 1856) from the first, held at "New Hope Meeting House" in S. C., to that held at Hebron, in this county. At the second Conference of 1859, steps were taken towards erecting a new church at Rockingham, and the following building committee was appointed: John W. Leak, Jas. P. Leak, Walter F. Leak, Walter L. Steele and Robt. S. Ledbetter. By liberal contributions from the members of this committee—one of whom paid a thousand dollars—the Methodists were enabled to have built their present large, if not very commodious church, which stands partly on the spot covered formerly by the old building, that having fronted East while this fronts North. We trust that every person present will excuse the sentiment of this moment, while we stop here to recall the last scene, in connection with that old church, that these eyes looked upon. It was on the 27th of June, 1861, a day that will ever be remembered by those who were here on that occasion. How great the enthusiasm of that day! The cause of the South was felt to be the cause of all; fruitless controversy was at an end; difference in opinion, as to the principles involved, was swallowed up by the stern reality that forced itself upon the minds of our people; the

great heart of the country throbbed in unison of patriotic feeling, and all conditions of our population were ready to contribute of their means and sympathy to forward and promote the common cause. The soldier-boys—"the Pee Dee Guards"—were now to take up the long four years' march, from which, alas, so many of them never returned. The fight was "on" in deadly earnestness and soon the "pomp and circumstance of glorious war" might fascinate and enthrall the better nature that needs to be nurtured and disciplined for the life beyond. What more fitting then, than that the boys should have been invited to the altar of the church, at that hour of trial to the soul, and assume the vows that might help them to conserve that better nature and resist the temptations of camp and field? Thus it was that by invitation of Rev. John Tillett, the preacher in charge, they assembled in the church, all to hear his last words of fatherly exhortation, and many of them to be enrolled as members of the church. It was indeed a soul-preparation for the grim possibilities that loomed up in the immediate future of each individual life. When, therefore, the hour of departure from the door of that old church came, when, with tearful eyes but stout hearts, that band of gallant boys bade adieu to the scenes of home and friends, the hearts and prayers of the people went with them; and as long as Rockingham shall have a place in the calendar of time will that day be marked as a melancholy but pleasing episode in her history.

At that time the new church was in process of building; and during the war—probably in 1863—it was formally dedicated by Dr. Chas. F. Deems, of blessed memory. Years after the war, about 1879, the Sunday-school chapel was built, and it was presented to the church by an old-time Methodist. Through 1861-'62 John Tillett served as circuit preacher, assisted—at least part of the time—by Wm. H. Wheeler, as junior preacher. Then came the successive administrations of H. H. Gibbons in 1863-'64; S. D. Adams in '65-'66; Joseph Wheeler in '67-'68; T. W. Guthrie in '69-'70-'71-'72; Joseph Wheeler again in '73-'74-'75-'76; J. W. Jenkins in '77-'78-'79, when the existence of Rockingham circuit, as then constituted, ended, and the town of Rockingham was made a station. We place the station preachers in the order following: H. T. Hudson in 1880; H. P. Cole in '81; J. B. Bobbitt in '82-'83; J. H. Guian in '84, whose death occurring on June 10, R. S. Ledbetter was appointed to the pastorate for the remainder of the year; J. H. Page in '85-'86-'87; M. L. Wood in '88-'89-'90-'91; W. B. Doub in '92-'93-'94 and—the hiatus will be filled by the Bishop who presides at the next Annual Conference.

The new Presiding Elder's District—called Rockingham District—was formed by the Annual Conference of 1891, and during the year 1892 Dr. M. L. Wood served it as Presiding Elder; Dr. W. H. Moore in 1893, and Dr. J. T. Gibbs is the present Presiding Elder.

And now, in conclusion, we beg to submit only a few observations: If, as is held

by many, the old days of the church were better than the new, in what respect is the proposition true? In old days religious zeal at times bordered on fanaticism, and doctrinal controversy, as between different sects and denominations, was kept continually at a "white heat." "My doxy is orthodoxy and your doxy is heterodoxy" was too often the impulse that dominated the minds of those engaged in such contests. Many an unseemly "war of words" was thus joined—ended; and no point settled except that of a settlement of bitter feelings in hearts otherwise attuned to a life of christian service. Fixing our minds at a period in the past—and we need not go very far back, let us give rein to our thoughts and lead on; and in proportion as we realize our nearness to the present day and hour, shall we appreciate the manifest decadence, if not death, of the spirit of bigotry and intolerance. And to-day there is more of the spirit of union, fellowship and fraternalism, among the christians of all creeds and denominations, than ever before existed. We may thank God for that, but stop: are we sure this bond of good fellowship has not something of the element of selfishness, policy, or expediency in it, and are we sure it consists altogether of that charity that vaunteth not itself? There is so much of the "commercial value" standard that enters into all phases of life these days, that we suspect christians of being unconsciously, in a manner, influenced by it. They combine together, "sing the songs of Zion" together, unite head and heart in a common cause, commune one with another, and pray together as one band of brethren; and yet we fear that, under the reflex influence of the "commercial"—or mercenary, if you please—conscience of these "times" they lose sight of a deeper and higher consideration in the thought that it pays to do this way, or at least that it would not pay to do otherwise. If this fellowship does not result purely and simply from the love "that envieth not," "seeketh not her own," "thinketh no evil," "hopeth all things," "endureth all things," but springs from a lower order of sympathy, born of a "community of interests," as it were, then such fellowship falls below the sanction of Heaven, is "of the earth, earthy," and has become as "sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal."

From such a point of view we contemplate the fathers as fortunate in that the "commercial conscience" had not pervaded all phases of life in their day. They were less subject to the influence of mere conventionality which, in these latter days, has so much to do with shaping the conduct of affairs as between individuals, and likewise between bodies of individuals, thrown together in church and all other relationships. We can all fellowship together, and do; and better a thousand times that we should do so than that, through estrangement produced by controversy and wrangling, in a spirit of "I am holier than thou" (because my creed is right and yours is wrong), we should stand aloof and inevitably grow rigid with cold formalism, each resting complacently in his and their own conceit.

The church would seem to have learned from the world that out of association,

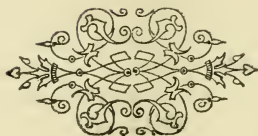
merely for associations' sake, comes advantage and advancement—of a sort. There is a friendship and brotherly attachment that springs up naturally between men or corporate bodies banded together for purposes of mere money-getting and the advancement of worldly interests. Does the church, in its now flourishing days of fellowship between the different denominations, stand always higher and above the dead-level of sordid motive and merely human nature; and, while we stand up and sing, "Blest be the tie that binds," have we fully discarded the secular idea so generally potent in modern affairs, and are we always and entirely unselfish in our aims for an impartial advancement, so that souls be saved, of Christ's Kingdom on Earth? If not, then does the church of this day suffer, in a most important particular, by comparison with the church of old days.

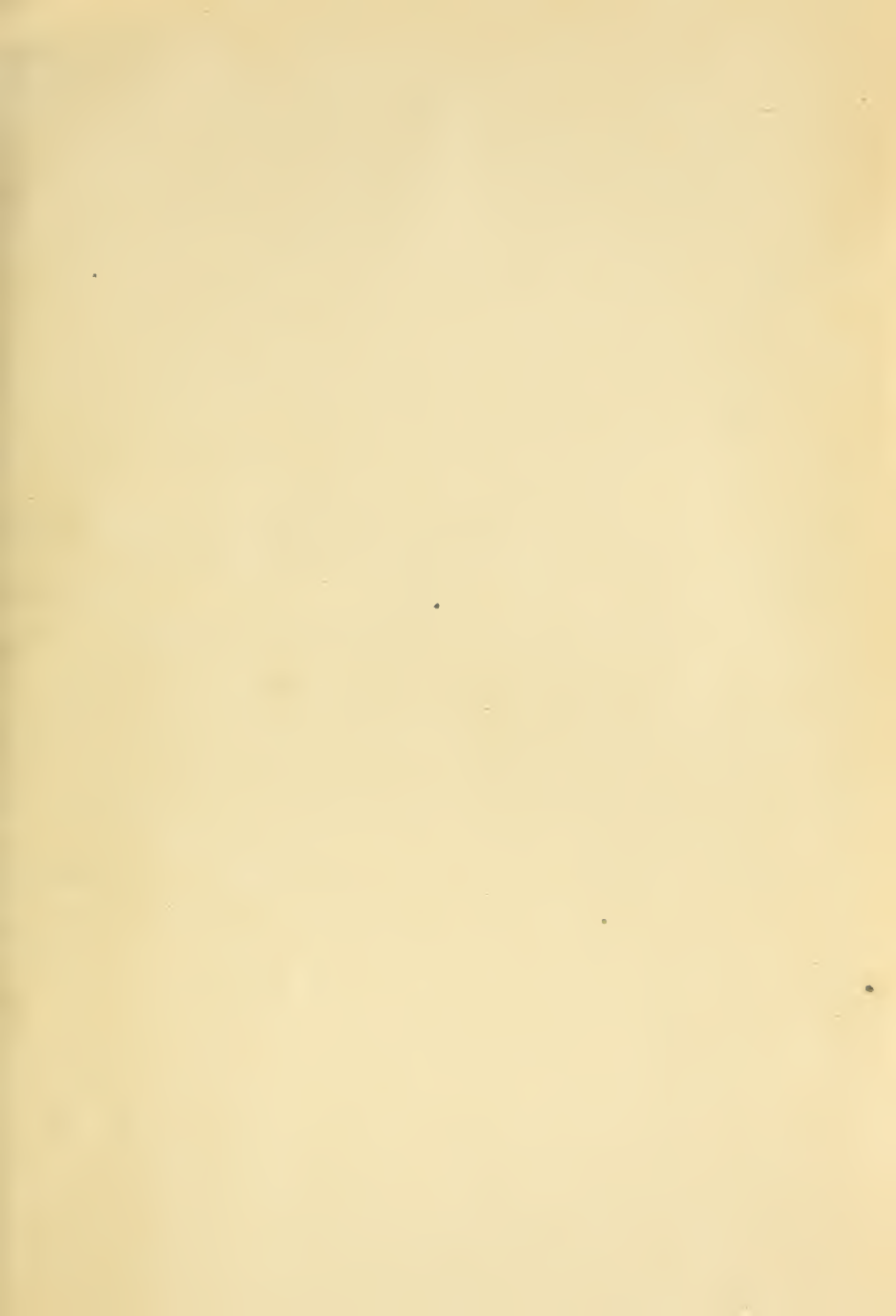
However the influences indicated, and new conditions arising, may or may not discount the present era of fellowship among brethren of different creeds—and we have only raised the question—the fellowship, as practiced by our fathers, was of the genuine stamp. They were controversial, oftentimes to extremes, but when they came together for purposes of union and communion, it was indeed a "love feast," shorn of all form or conventionality, and subject to no extraneous considerations that might distract or disturb the "unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." And so we conclude that, as we go backward and approach closer the borders of the olden time of the church, we may find infinitely less of the spirit of wordliness and of the influence of secular method and system of procedure; and in proportion as we examine into its primitive and, therefore, simplest practices, a deeper spirituality in its membership might be found. The church of to-day is far in advance of the church of the past—yes, materially, numerically, financially, and otherwise not indicated; but we may well take to heart a comparison with the spiritual state that distinguished its membership. Some of us remember well the old "camp-meeting" days of the Methodists. For months beforehand would preparations be in process for the duly appointed event, which was usually set in the Fall of the year, after crops were practically gathered and when barn and larder were full. Of their abundance would the people contribute with lavish hand. An immense arbor was built for the preaching-place; rudely-constructed shanties, called "tents," were arranged in a circle, at a convenient distance, around the place for preaching and services. Here would the people, congregating from within a radius of several miles, domicile their families and keep open house for the entertainment of preachers and other visitors. There was always, as much as possible, an absence of formality in the conduct and arrangement for divine service; plain preachers preached plainly to plain people—a simple, ungarnished gospel. Those were seasons when the Saviour's saying: "The poor have the gospel preached to them," was practically and truthfully illustrated; and as a result of those protracted meetings there were peaceful homes, quiet and orderly neighborhoods, a God-fearing and God-serving citizenship, and a

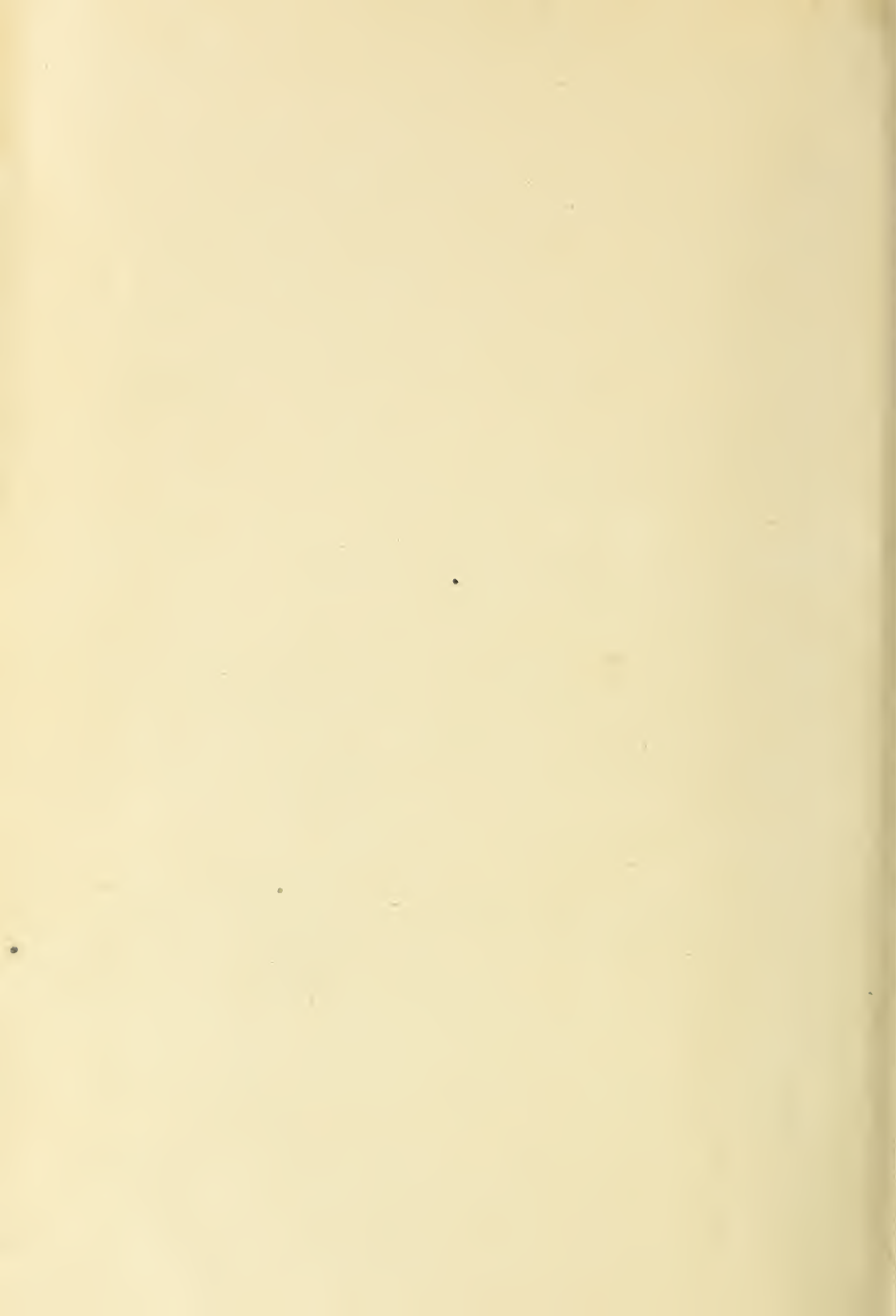
family life such as that drawn by the Scottish bard in "The Cotter's Saturday Night":

"Compared with this, how poor Religion's pride,  
 With all the pomp of method and of art,  
 When men display to congregations wide  
 Devotion's every grace, except the heart;  
 The Power, incensed, the pageant will desert,  
 The pompous strain, the sacerdotal stole;  
 But haply, in some cottage far apart,  
 Will hear, well pleased, the language of the soul,  
 And in His Book of Life the inmates poor enroll."

H. C. Wall Esq.  
 Author -











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